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EPA begins Libby cleanup

Contract workers of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have begun removing asbestos-contaminated vermiculite insulation from private homes in Libby, using a vacuum truck and sealing the material in bags that are taken to a specially-constructed cell at the landfill north of town.

About 50 homes are expected to be cleaned this year, said Duc Nguyen of EPA at the Community Advisory Group meeting in Libby

on Aug. 8. Meanwhile, Nguyen said, the EPA continues to screen 3,000 homes for the presence of vermiculite insulation.

At least 88 Libby and Troy residents are known to have died, and about 400 more are sick, after being exposed to toxic tremolite asbestos that was in vermiculite ore mined near Libby by W.R. Grace & Co. The ore was used to make products that were sold nationwide, such as building insulation,

fireproofing materials and potting soil.

Since November, 1999, the EPA has been assessing the extent of Libby's asbestos contamination and removing contaminated soil and building materials. Libby is currently on track to becoming an EPA Superfund site and the cleanup is expected to take about three years.



Montanian photo by David F. Latham

Asbestos cleanup underway

The first cleanups of asbestos-contaminated vermiculite have begun in Libby as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency continues to screen over 3,000 homes, businesses and properties for contamination. Above, workers build a temporary route for dump trucks and excavators into property owned by Barb Spencer on Jaw Effar Rd. See related story above.